

# **FIRE SERVICES OPTIONS**

## **Issue:**

The City must address the immediate need for short-term Fire Department leadership and level of service challenges, following the repercussions from the recent audit by the Department of Retirement Systems.

## **Background:**

- In 2010, the City applied for a SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grant from FEMA to add 3 additional firefighters and allow for 3-person minimum staffing. The SAFER grant was received in 2011 for a two year period and expires on April 6, 2013.
- After being elected in 2012, Mayor Michael Grayum convened a Community Finance Committee to provide a thorough review of the City's budget and recommend options for a long-term debt financing strategy. After reviewing the Committee's recommendations, Council placed a levy proposal on the November 2012 ballot to provide funding for both debt service payments and preservation of public safety services. The ballot measure did not pass.
- As Mayor Grayum regularly reported in 2012, ambulance transport and Advanced Life Support (ALS) services from private companies significantly diminished. Additionally, neighboring entities that previously provided transport and ALS resources to DuPont from West Pierce Fire, Central Pierce Fire, and Madigan discontinued their assistance.

## **Actions Taken To Date:**

- The City worked with FEMA to extend the grant period through July 15, 2013 to fully utilize all grant proceeds. Although delayed, the three firefighter positions will still be eliminated and will drastically modify the services the Fire Department is able to provide to the community.
- During the 2013 budget process, the Mayor proposed and the Council implemented significant expenditure reductions and instituted revenue enhancements to prevent the loss of additional, non-grant funded firefighters and police officer positions.
- Budget reductions included elimination of the contract with West Pierce Fire & Rescue, effective January 1, 2013. This eliminated the ½ time Fire Operations Chief position and required the Fire Department to bring Information Technology, Records Management, and Training services in-house.
- Fire personnel began providing limited Basic Life Support ambulance transport service as staffing allowed (3- person minimum staffing required).
- Mayor Grayum proposed and the Council adopted updated ambulance transport fees in January 2013 to allow the City to begin recouping costs to provide service.

- Mayor Grayum proposed and the Fire Department implemented a Reserve EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) program to help address transport services. Recruitment was initially successful, but is presently proving to be challenging due to recent developments with the Department of Retirement Systems.

#### Recent Developments:

- An article in the Associated Press was published regarding pension spiking, which precipitated a WA State Department of Retirement Systems audit that resulted in Contract Fire Chief Greg Hull's resignation to prevent the loss of his retirement benefits.
- Mayor Grayum continues to remind the community and Council of the impending July 15, 2013 SAFER grant expiration, which will result in a transition from 3-person minimum staffing per shift to 2-person minimum staffing per shift, resulting in a reduced level of service to the community.

#### Basic Constraints:

- DuPont is challenged to provide ambulance transport and Advanced Life Support (ALS) services due to our geographic location coupled with the increasing lack of ALS response services in the southern part of Pierce County. Washington State EMS requires transports to be conducted by two trained EMTs. We cannot transport with one person, nor can we staff a fire engine with one person if two firefighters are on a transport. This means we are out of service whether we are waiting with a patient for a private ambulance to arrive or if we are transporting them ourselves. Wait times for a private ambulance can sometimes exceed one hour. Additionally, we need to obtain permission to transport ALS patients in our Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance. This presents a significant risk to our community.
- With either 2-person or 3-person minimum staffing, DuPont is unable to meet the nationally recognized NFPA Standard 1710 of two in/two out. This rule requires that firefighters work in teams of at least two persons when in a hazardous situation and that there are two properly equipped firefighters outside the hazardous area monitoring the activities of the two in the hazardous area and can rescue them if they get in trouble. DuPont relies on mutual aid to supply enough staffing to meet this standard, meaning we can't fight interior fires until mutual aid arrives. DuPont's staffing model renders us out of compliance with the following firefighter safety standards:
  - Washington Administrative Code 296.306 – Vertical Standard for Firefighters – safety standards for firefighters; and
  - National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1710 – standards for the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations to the public by career fire departments.



## SHORT-TERM OPTIONS

### LEVEL OF SERVICE:

#### Option #1 - Reduction to 2-person minimum staffing per shift

**Description:** The Fire Department will reduce to 2-person minimum staffing per shift effective July 16, 2013. This is due to the expiration of the SAFER grant, which funded 3 Firefighter positions.

**Service Level Impacts:** DuPont Fire will no longer be able to provide limited transport services unless staffing levels are augmented by Reserve EMTs. We will need to rely almost exclusively on private ambulance services. This staffing level is unprecedented in Pierce County. If we operate with 2-person minimum staffing we run the risk of our neighbors pulling out of mutual aid agreements. This would be due to our inability to reciprocate mutual aid services and because of our non-compliance with the nationally recognized firefighter safety standards:

- o Washington Administrative Code 296.306 – Vertical Standard for Firefighters – safety standards for firefighters; and
- o National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1710 – standards for the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations to the public by career fire departments.

#### Pros and Cons Review:

| PROS   | CONS   |
|--|--|
| Limited financial impact to reduce to 2-person minimum staffing per shift. | Continue primary reliance on private ambulance providers for transport services.           |
|  | No transport services provided by Fire Department unless augmented by Reserve EMTs.        |
|  | DuPont Fire will be out of service while waiting for private transport services to arrive. |
|  | Risk loss of mutual aid agreements with neighboring jurisdictions.                         |
|  | This staffing model is unprecedented in Pierce County.                                     |

**Financial Implications:** The Fire Department will incur limited overtime costs to ensure 2-person minimum staffing.

#### Option #2 – Preserve 3-person minimum staffing per shift

**Description:** The Fire Department would retain 3-person minimum staffing per shift by retaining a 10<sup>th</sup> firefighter position.

**Service Level Impacts:** DuPont Fire would continue to be able to provide limited transport services, although we will continue to rely primarily on private ambulance services. Unless staffing levels are augmented by Reserve EMTs, DuPont Fire would still be out of service for the duration of the transport.

**Pros and Cons Review:**

| PROS   | CONS   |
|--|--|
| The 10 <sup>th</sup> firefighter position will provide 3-person minimum staffing for approximately 75% of shifts.    | Continue primary reliance on private ambulance providers for transport services.           |
| Limited transport services provided by DuPont Fire on shifts with 3 persons on duty or if augmented by Reserve EMTs. | DuPont Fire will be out of service while waiting for private transport services to arrive. |

**Financial Implications:** The cost to retain the 10<sup>th</sup> firefighter position is approximately \$43,250 through the end of 2013.

**SHORT-TERM LEADERSHIP:**

**Option #1 – Contract for Services**

**Description:** The City would contract with a neighboring jurisdiction for temporary command support to oversee the operational, leadership and training/mentoring needs of the Fire Department.

**Pros and Cons Review:**

| PROS  | CONS  |
|---|---|
| Would provide proven, experienced leadership and support for the Fire Department. | Neighboring jurisdiction may not be as familiar with DuPont Fire personnel and practices. |

**Financial Implications:** The short-term cost to contract for Interim Fire Chief and Interim Operations Chief services from a neighboring jurisdiction is anticipated to be approximately \$8,500 per month - or \$51,000 through the end of 2013.

**Option #2 – Temporary Internal Promotion**

**Description:** The City would temporarily promote a Lieutenant to Battalion Chief of Operations to provide leadership for operation and administrative duties. We would also temporarily promote a Firefighter to Lieutenant, and hire a temporary Firefighter to fill the vacant position created by the internal promotions.

**Pros and Cons Review:**

| PROS  | CONS  |
|---|---|
| If this option is implemented in conjunction with reduction to 2-person minimum staffing level, this position would assist with providing 3-person staffing level from Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM, allowing limited transport services to occur during this time frame if needed. | Would not provide as experienced leadership that a contract Operations Chief could. |



Internal staff is familiar with DuPont Fire personnel and practices.

The Battalion Chief could not represent Fire management during collective bargaining and other labor/management issues while maintaining their union membership.

Financial Implications: The cost to promote internal candidates to Battalion Chief and Lieutenant respectively and hire a temporary firefighter would be approximately \$44,500 through the end of 2013.

#### Costing of Options Matrix:

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| 2-person minimum staffing level w/internal promotion for command services | 2-person minimum staffing level w/ contract with neighboring jurisdiction for command services | Retain 10 <sup>th</sup> firefighter w/internal promotion for command services | Retain 10 <sup>th</sup> firefighter w/ contract with neighboring jurisdiction for command services |
| \$44,500  | \$51,000   | \$87,750  | \$94,250   |

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

Level of Service: Retain the 10<sup>th</sup> firefighter position and preserve 3-person minimum staffing per shift.

Funding: Recommended funding could come from a combination of expenditure savings and anticipated revenue collections.

##### Expenditure Resources

|                                     |          |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| Fire Chief Contract Savings         | \$58,170 |
| Finance Specialist Position Savings | 20,545   |

##### Revenue Resources

Sales Tax Collections

\$15,535

- unexpected  
(one-time)

Total Resources

\$94,250

Long-Term Goal: Provide fully equipped, professional Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to the City of DuPont. This includes staffing of a fire engine, a ladder truck, and having an Advanced Life Support (ALS) capable transport unit.

#### Next Steps:

The short-term options presented are only an attempt to address the immediate needs of the Fire Department. Moving forward, the City will evaluate and pursue longer-term service delivery options for a full service Fire and EMS capabilities in DuPont. The community will be invited to share their vision and ideas as we continue through this process. Long-term discussions will take place at future Council meetings.